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## Engaging Local Tastes To Satisfy A Global Palate

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From the intern's desk to the executive suite at the OSI Group, **David McDonald** has a unique perspective on major shifts on the global food industry.



Contributed Photo

## ENGAGING LOCAL TASTES TO SATISFY A GLOBAL PALATE

By Melea Reicks Licht

David McDonald started training for his job as president and chief operating officer of the OSI Group more than 25 years ago when he was hired as the company's first intern.

McDonald ('87 animal science) grew up on a family farm in Northeast Iowa and initially planned on veterinary school after graduation from Iowa State. But with the help of career service director Roger Bruene, he landed the internship that would lead McDonald to becoming president of a \$5 billion multi-national food processing company.

He started full time as a project manager fresh out of college and worked his way through the ranks helping OSI expand, especially in Latin America and Asia.

"OSI's heritage includes being the first beef patty supplier to Ray Kroc and McDonald's in 1955," he says. "We've grown internationally with McDonald's and have expanded that global network to meet other customers' needs."

McDonald says OSI's "growth mentality" thrived because of its global relationship with McDonald's, decentralized management and its commitment to food safety and quality standards. The company, headquar-

tered in Aurora, Ill., has 47 processing facilities in 17 countries. It supplies fully cooked or ready-to-cook products—primarily protein—to many of the world's leading food brands.

"No matter where we are—China, India, Poland—we feel it is important to know the local needs and respect traditions and cultural influences," McDonald says. "We establish local management teams and allow them to make as many decisions as possible since they are much closer to the customer."

For example, OSI's product development team in China developed rice-based items and shredded meats preferred by Chinese consumers. Collaboration with the local team resulted in successful new product launches for two global customers in the region.

Throughout his career McDonald says he's seen customers take a more active role in understanding where and how their food is produced.

"Customers have always been focused on taste and quality, but over the last decade, they've asked more questions about how their product was processed, how it was

raised and by whom. They want to make sure it was done in a sustainable manner to be sure people, places and resources aren't exploited in the process," he says.

Doing business in Europe led OSI to incorporate sustainability initiatives and develop organic and natural products before such trends were significant in the United States. OSI also is actively involved in making sure its operations and suppliers are meeting or exceeding animal welfare practice standards.

According to McDonald, OSI's versatile supply chain approach allows the company to adapt to the many consumer demands worldwide. "Creating products for the highly informed and involved consumer is the future for OSI," says McDonald. ■

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From the kitchen of: **David McDonald**

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